

Paula Farrell



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Entry details

Entry Name: Acadia University's Allergen Aware Accommodation Station

Institution Name: Acadia University

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Paula Farrell Registered Dietitian

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Essay:

Meeting the diverse dietary needs of students is foundational to an inclusive campus dining experience. In 2025, Acadia University strengthened its leadership in accessible dining through the expansion of its comprehensive allergen management program and the launch of the innovative Allergen Aware Accommodation Station at Wheelock Dining Hall.

This program directly addresses rising dietary restrictions—including allergies, intolerances, religious practices, and lifestyle preferences—through an innovative, student-centered model designed to exceed expectations for safety, nutrition, and choice.

The program's goals were clearly defined from the outset:

Deliver a highly accessible, innovative service model offering a rotating two-week menu, build-your-own components, and full meal customization—all free from the top 11 priority allergens plus gluten.

Provide equitable, high-quality dining options for students with complex dietary needs, ensuring variety comparable to standard service lines.

Improve communication, trust, and transparency through 1:1 consultation with a registered dietitian and direct communication between students and the sous chef preparing their meals.

Promote student well-being and inclusion by removing barriers that often limit safe, enjoyable, and socially shared dining experiences.

The Allergen Aware Station is intentionally designed so that ingredients containing the top allergens never enter the space. Food is prepared, displayed, and served in a fully controlled environment, eliminating cross-contact risk and ensuring information is easy for students to understand and access. The station's flexible model allows students to choose freely, customize confidently, and enjoy meals alongside peers without feeling singled out or restricted.

To support adoption, we implemented a multifaceted communication campaign including residence life partnerships, digital and print signage, orientation presentations, targeted outreach to students registered with Accessibility Services, and direct referrals from campus health professionals. Messaging emphasizes clarity, safety, and simplicity, ensuring students understand exactly how to access the service and what it offers.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. More than 6% of total meal plan students are actively registered, with steady growth as awareness increases. Since implementation, students report improved meal satisfaction, greater autonomy, and significantly reduced anxiety around dining. Evidence demonstrates that the program is successfully reaching its target audience and achieving its intended outcomes.

Importantly, the program benefits individuals beyond those with severe allergies. Students with Celiac disease, gluten intolerance, lactose intolerance, sensory-based eating needs, and medically prescribed diets now experience broader options, consistent quality, and improved nutritional adequacy. By offering meals that are safe, enjoyable, and socially inclusive, we support students' health, confidence, and sense of belonging during a pivotal stage of personal development.

The Allergen Aware Accommodation Station is a transformative, innovative advancement in equitable, student-focused dining and sets a new benchmark for accessible food service on campus.

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Allergen Aware ... 696 KiB



Allergen Aware ... 272 KiB



Allergen Station...369 KiB



Allergen Station...2.9 MiB



Allergen Station...2.5 MiB



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Allergen Station...61 KiB



Allergen Aware ... 1.1 MiB



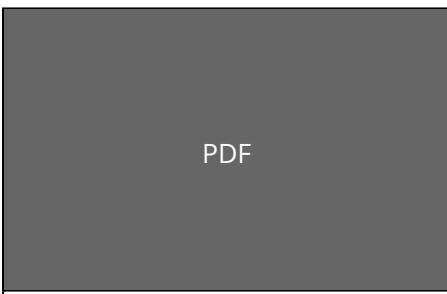
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Acadia Dining I... 1.7 MiB



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First Allergen St... 566 KiB



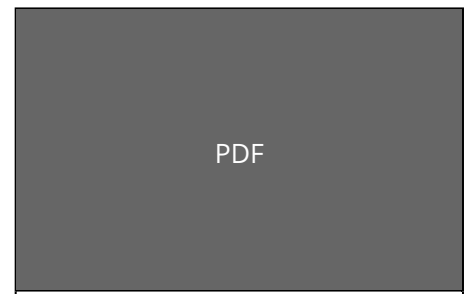
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Student feedba... 402 KiB



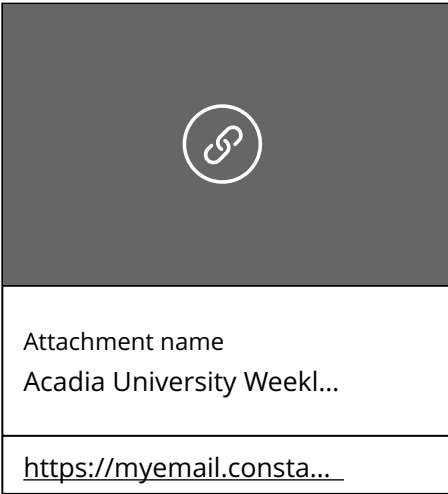
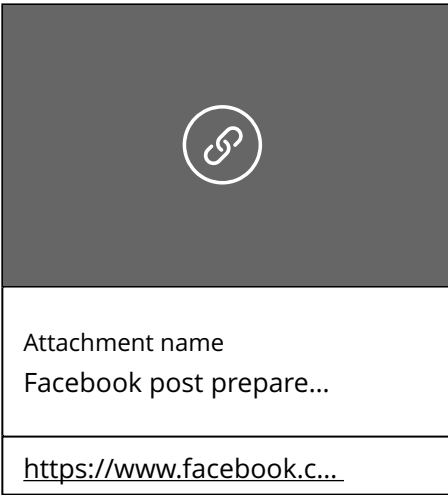
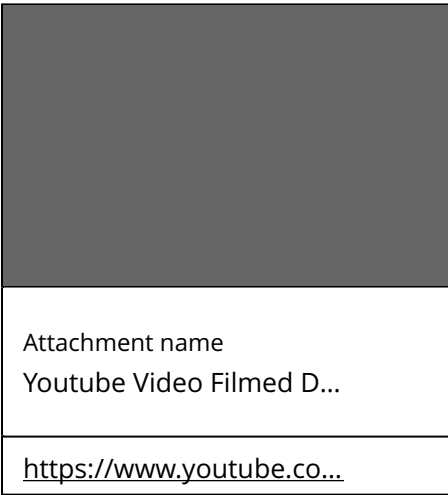
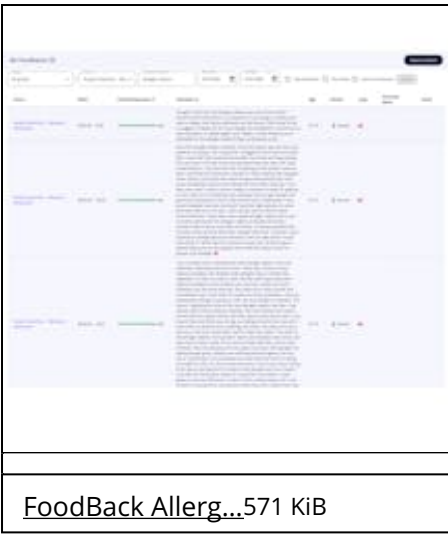
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Positive Studen... 478 KiB



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Parent Inquiry a...134 KiB



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